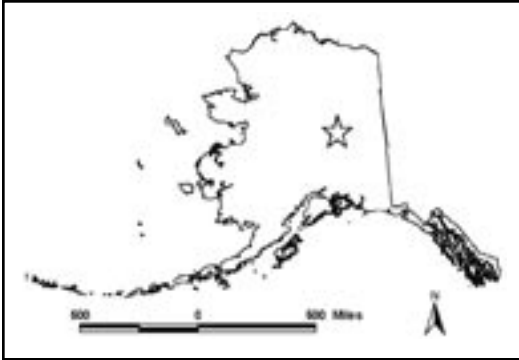


CHAPTER 1.0 Introduction



Map 1. Location of Ladd Field, now Fort Wainwright.

On September 1, 1939, bulldozer crews were clearing a swath through the woods east of the frontier mining town of Fairbanks, Alaska. There, at a site along the Chena River, the U.S. Army Air Corps was preparing to construct a new research airfield for cold weather testing. On the same day on the other side of the world, Germany suddenly invaded Poland, launching World War II in Europe. That day, the new airfield on the Chena was nothing more than a road scraped out of willow and spruce thickets, but it was destined to grow rapidly. It would become known as Ladd Field and would play a part in the worldwide conflict that followed.

By 1945, Ladd Field had become a very different place. Geography and circumstance had handed the airfield unforeseen missions. Cold weather testing remained a primary task, but over the course of the war, Ladd Field also became a military air traffic hub and an aircraft repair and supply depot. Ladd also served as the transfer point for Lend-Lease aircraft deliveries to the Soviet Union along the Alaska-Siberia (ALSIB) flight route.

To serve these varied wartime missions, the airfield grew from the small, carefully planned permanent garrison that the Air Corps had originally envisioned into a vastly expanded complex. By 1945, the original base had doubled its acreage and had acquired a sprawling bombing range to the south. At war's end, the airfield boasted more than 700 buildings which could accommodate over 4,500 troops. Many of them had been hurriedly constructed and were never intended to last beyond the war's duration.

After the war ended, Ladd's missions continued to evolve and the installation's infrastructure adapted to these changes. In 1947, when the Air Force became a separate service, the installation was renamed Ladd Air Force Base. By then, the temporary wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union had collapsed. A tense Cold War developed between the two nations, and ironically, the same airfield which had hosted the Lend-Lease program in WWII became one of its first outposts. The first decade of the Cold War placed more unforeseen demands on Ladd's facilities. The base expanded again with new construction to accommodate Cold War missions that included strategic reconnaissance, air defense, and Arctic research. In 1961, Ladd AFB was transferred to the Army and renamed Fort Jonathan Wainwright. During the remainder of the Cold War, the post hosted infantry, artillery, and aviation units assigned to defend Alaska and support Arctic training. Since 1986, rapid worldwide deployment has also been a component of Army missions at Fort Wainwright. Today, the post prepares for another transformation into a Stryker Brigade.

With each incarnation, the installation's infrastructure and design philosophies were adapted to the missions and needs of the time. Today, Ft. Wainwright is an active Army post. A core of Ladd Field's original permanent buildings and a



small number of other World War II buildings remain and are managed by the U.S. Army Garrison Alaska as part of the Ladd Field National Historic Landmark (NHL). Building numbers on the post have changed since the wartime era. When extant buildings are mentioned, the modern numbers are used for convenience.

Purpose of This Project

The Ladd Field NHL was designated in 1985 after Congress directed the National Park Service to identify World War II heritage sites associated with the war in the Pacific.¹ During the past decade, the Department of Defense, also under Congressional direction, implemented a facilities reduction program which required military installations to reduce excess square footage. This mandate led to the removal of a number of buildings at Fort Wainwright that were not directly tied to current Army missions. Some of the buildings within the Ladd Field NHL were affected by the demolition program. In 2001, a Memorandum of Agreement took effect, providing stipulations to mitigate the demolition of certain buildings that contributed to the Ladd Field NHL.² Two of these stipulations require interpretation of the NHL, that is, educational displays and publications about the NHL resources.

The cultural resources program at Ft. Wainwright conducted this project, in part, to provide documentation for the development of this interpretive material. To assist future interpretation, the program has attempted to collect elements of Ladd Field's history together in one place, research some of the units that had escaped attention, and supplement existing histories with new material from personal recollections and oral histories. This was necessary because there is no detailed published overview focusing specifically on Ladd Field's role during the war. Most of the published material on Ladd Field is embedded within the histories of larger topics, such as Lend-Lease or Alaskan military history. Articles and unpublished reports recorded by contemporary observers are scattered in various archives and libraries. Some aspects of the story had received very little historical attention.

The Ft. Wainwright Cultural Resources Working Group also identified a need to collect oral histories from those who served and worked on Ladd Field during World War II.³ Recorded interviews were done in the Fairbanks area and deposited with the University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives.⁴ Because many of the people contacted now reside outside the Fairbanks area, personal recollections were also added through correspondence and telephone interviews. The cultural resources program extends its thanks to all of those who participated, and

¹ By then, most of the temporary World War II buildings had already been removed. See Chapter Nine and Appendix A for additional information on the NHL.

² "Memorandum of Agreement Among the U.S. Department of the Army, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer Regarding United States Army Alaska Demolition of Buildings in the Ladd Field National Historic Landmark," June 2001. In addition to the three named parties of the MOA, other interested parties that participated in the development of the MOA included the National Park Service, the Fairbanks Historic Preservation Commission, the Tanana Chiefs Conference, the Tanana-Yukon Historical Society and the Interior Alaska and Arctic Aeronautical Foundation. The MOA addressed the proposed demolition of nine buildings within the landmark.

³ The Ft. Wainwright Cultural Resources Working Group includes federal, state, and local agencies and groups interested in cultural resource management on the post.

⁴ References for each interview are available in the bibliography. Quotations from project interviews are not individually footnoted in the text.

recognizes contributors individually in the acknowledgements at the end of this publication.

Because the overall goal of the research project was to collect and develop background material for the interpretation of the landmark, this report is not intended to be a standard cultural resources survey or a definitive historical study on any single aspect of Ladd Field's history. It is not a command or unit history, although those topics are addressed when they are helpful in understanding the events taking place at Ladd. Instead, the aim of this publication is to provide a description of the variety of Ladd's wartime activities and to begin making this heritage more accessible to the public, post residents, and future researchers.

This report is limited to the activities that took place at Ladd Field itself and only summarizes the larger contexts that affected these events. Readers interested in a wider historical picture may want to consult some of the sources listed below. Overviews of military history in Alaska include Jonathan M. Nielson, *Armed Forces on a Northern Frontier: The Military in Alaska's History, 1867-1987*; Lyman L. Woodman, *Duty Station Northwest: The U.S. Army in Alaska and Western Canada 1867-1987*; and John H. Cloe and Michael F. Monaghan, *Top Cover for America: The Air Force in Alaska 1920-1983*.

The ALSIB Lend-Lease program is described in numerous publications. These include Otis Hays, Jr., *The Alaska-Siberian Connection: The World War II Air Route*; Blake W. Smith, *Warplanes to Alaska*; Stan Cohen, *The Forgotten War: A Pictorial History of World War II in Alaska and Northwestern Canada*; and Everett Long and Ivan Neganblya, *Cobras over the Tundra*. Scholarly studies of Lend-Lease diplomatic history include Hays' study of ALSIB and Hubert van Tuyl's *Feeding the Bear: American Aid to the Soviet Union, 1941-1945*.

The Aleutian campaign and other Alaskan World War II history is detailed in Cloe, *Top Cover for America*; Cloe, *The Aleutian Warriors: A History of the 11th Air Force and Fleet Air Wing 4*; Cohen, *The Forgotten War*; and Brian Garfield, *The Thousand Mile War*. Historical papers presented at the 1993 Alaska at War Symposium are collected in *Alaska at War 1941-1945*, Fern Chandonnet, editor. Military construction in Alaska is addressed in Cloe, *Top Cover for America*;

James D. Bush, Jr., *Narrative Report of Alaska Construction 1941-1944*; Lisa Mighetto and Carla Homstad, *Engineering in the Far North: A History of the U.S. Army Engineer District in Alaska*; and Benjamin B. Talley and Virginia Talley, "Building Alaska's Defenses in World War II" in Chandonnet.⁵

Ladd Field was part of the national war effort in World War II and had a lasting impact on Fairbanks. The people of Ladd Field played their part in these events. Today others follow in their footsteps and respond to the challenges of our time. As they do, they carry forward the history of Ladd Field at Fort Wainwright and beyond.



Figure 1. Parade ground, Ladd Field, 1945. Courtesy Audrey Virden.

⁵ See bibliography for references.

